

OPINION

Kingston nailed its response to a COVID-19 salon outbreak

**ANDRÉ PICARD** >

PUBLISHED JUNE 29, 2020

UPDATED JULY 2, 2020

PUBLISHED JUNE 29, 2020

This article was published more than 1 year ago. Some information in it may no longer be current.

40 COMMENTS ← SHARE — A **A+** TEXT SIZE BOOKMARK



Sign up for the [Coronavirus Update newsletter](#) to read the day's essential coronavirus news, features and explainers written by Globe reporters.

A nail salon. A Hutterite community. A farm. A family barbecue. A condo.

These are all places in Canada that have been associated with outbreaks of COVID-19 in recent days.

As the economy reopens, we relax a bit (too much?) and interactions increase in workplaces and public spaces, we can expect a lot more of these flare-ups and hot spots.

It's the same pattern we're seeing worldwide, of outbreaks caused by people gathering in confined indoor spaces. In Japan, karaoke bars; South Korea, nightclubs; Italy, funerals; Spain, family gatherings; Germany, religious services.

They serve as a reminder that the threat posed by the novel coronavirus is far from over, but also that, as the pandemic evolves, so, too, must our responses.

The story of Binh's Nail & Spa in Kingston, is a good example. So far, at least 27 cases have been linked to the salon.

Kingston issues face-mask order after COVID-19 outbreak at nail salon

Another 700 or so people have been told to isolate for 14 days because of possible exposure to staff, clients and their close contacts. This is all because a few people got their nails done without proper precautions in place.

Dr. Kieran Moore, the medical officer of health for Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington Public Health, did a tremendous job of explaining how this happened at a press conference that doubled as an Epidemiology 101 course.

He also set a great example for how we need to respond to community outbreaks going forward. Dr. Moore stated clearly where the outbreak began – not to blame and shame Binh's, but to provide the public with actionable information. Doing so made contact tracing a lot easier because clients were able to come forward for testing.

This refreshing transparency is a stark contrast to Ontario's provincial public-health officials, who guard information on where community transmission is occurring as if the data were the Gold Codes needed to launch a nuclear attack.

The coronavirus has not, and likely will not, be eradicated any time soon. In the coming months, we have to expect a constant series of small coronavirus fires – in condos, in schools, in workplaces and places of worship. It's essential that we be prepared to contain and control those flare-ups quickly.

Dr. Moore also took clear action in response to the nail salon outbreak, ordering that masks must be worn in all indoor public spaces in the Kingston health region.

Again, clear guidance is far better than the endless procrastination and muddled messaging of federal and provincial officials.

While mask-wearing is not a panacea, it is clearly helpful, especially as we mingle more. What Canadians want, and need, right now are clear rules on where masks must be worn.

The hundreds of COVID-19 cases we are seeing among migrant farmworkers in Southern Ontario are another reminder that we can't afford to be cavalier about the coronavirus.

It is unthinkable crass to cram workers into bunkhouses and have them work elbow to elbow in greenhouses when we know these are ideal conditions for the spread of disease.

While the agricultural-food sector is important, the provision of fruits and vegetables cannot come at the expense of workers' lives. British Columbia has shown that large-scale infection of migrant workers is avoidable with a bit of planning, and there is no excuse for Ontario to not be taking similar precautions.

The reopening of the economy is necessary, but it has to be done thoughtfully and cautiously. One of the key lessons of pandemic response that we've (hopefully) learned is that you have to shut down quickly and reopen slowly. And when things don't go as planned, you need to have the political and public-health acumen to adjust.

Canada, over several months, has been reining in COVID-19 slowly and not so surely. We're down to a few hundred new cases a day, still largely in Ontario and Quebec, but Alberta just recorded its biggest single-day jump in nearly six weeks.

We know more localized outbreaks will occur and the key is to respond aggressively – Kingston-like.

The price of complacency is high, as witnessed by the horrors we are seeing now in Texas, Florida and other parts of the southern United States.

Nobody wants to see a massive spike in cases. Nor does anyone want another lockdown.

We want to get back to normal. But it would be a shame to waste the sacrifices we've already made by rushing to get our nails done, playing host to a big barbecue or indulging in a night of bar-hopping.

Sign up for the Coronavirus Update newsletter to read the day's essential coronavirus news, features and explainers written by Globe reporters.

